

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 1396

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IZ, US
SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER DISCUSSES US-IRAQI RELATIONS

REF: BAGHDAD A-38

1. USINT HAS NOW OBTAINED AUGUST 5 ISSUE OF AL-WATAN
AL-ARABI WHICH CONTAINS UNDATED INTERVIEW OF INFORMATION
MINISTER TARIQ AZIZ. HIS REMARKS ABOUT RELATIONS WITH US,
WHICH WERE SUMMARIZED IN ENCLOSURE TO REFAIR, AND
USINT COMMENT ARE AS FOLLOWS:

"IN FACT, WE ARE NOT IN PRINCIPLE AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF RELATIONS WITH ANY STATE IN THE WORLD, EXCEPT FOR THE
ZIONIST ENTITY WHICH WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE AS A LEGAL ENTITY.
WE DESIRE TO ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH EVERY STATE WHICH
WE RECOGNIZE AS LEGITIMATE. THE RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAQ
AND AMERICA WERE BROKEN PRIOR TO OUR COMING TO POWER.
THEY WERE BROKEN BECAUSE OF THE AMERICAN POSITION IN
SUPPORT OF ISRAEL, AND WE HAVE CONTINUED THE
BREAK IN RELATIONS BECAUSE WE DO NOT BELIEVE AMERICA
HAS YET TO CHANGE ITS STANCE OF EXCEPTIONAL ALIGNMENT
WITH ISRAEL. IT IS NOT OUR ASPIRATION THAT IN THE
PRESENT HISTORICAL STATE, ALL STATES OF THE WORLD,
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INCLUDING AMERICA, WILL TAKE A POSITION IN SUPPORT
OF THE ARABS. WE KNOW THE REALITIES OF
WORLD POLITICS, AND WE SIMPLY DESIRE THAT STATES WILL
TAKE A BALANCED POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE ARAB-
ZIONIST STRUGGLE. SOME STATES HAVE MOVED IN THIS
DIRECTION TO VARYING DEGREES. FRANCE HAS MOVED MORE
RAPIDLY THAN GERMANY, AND PERHAPS GERMANY HAS DONE SO

MORE CLEARLY THAN HAS BRITAIN, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE TO SAY THAT THE PROGRESS MADE BY THESE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IS APPRECIATED BY THE ARABS.

AS FOR THE U.S. WE CONSIDER THAT IT HAS NOT MADE PROGRESS. FOR THIS REASON WE REJECT ON PRINCIPLE THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS, BUT WE ARE ALSO OBSERVING CAREFULLY ANY PROGRESS WHICH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION IN AMERICA MAKES TOWARD BALANCING ITS POSITION BETWEEN THE ARABS AND THE ZIONIST ENTITY. THE MATTER DEPENDS ON AMERICA, NOT WITH RESPECT TO ITS ACCEPTANCE OF THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS, BECAUSE IT IS MORE EAGER THAN WE ARE TO RESUME RELATIONS, BUT IT DEPENDS ON AMERICA'S POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE (ARAB-ISRAELI) ISSUE. IF WE FIND ANYTHING IN THIS REGARD TO ENCOURAGE US THEN I BELIEVE THAT THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP WILL NOT OBJECT TO A RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS, BUT IF WE DO NOT FIND ANYTHING ENCOURAGING, THEN WE WILL NOT BE OVER ENTHUSIASTIC FOR SUCH A STEP."

2. THE INTERVIEWER THEN ASKED WHETHER DISCUSSIONS ARE PRESENTLY TAKING PLACE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND THE MINISTER REPLIED "NO. AS WE SAID WHEN THE AMERICAN UNDER SECRETARY VISITED US AND MET WITH THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WE DO NOT HAVE ANY CONFIDENTIAL

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CONTACTS WITH THE AMERICANS (SIC) AND IT IS NOT OUR POLICY TO CONDUCT SECRET CONTACTS. IF WE WANTED TO HAVE CONTACTS THEN WE WOULD DO SO OPENLY. WE HAVE NOTHING TO DREAD OR FEAR."

3. COMMENT. SINCE THE INTERVIEW IS UNDATED IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY WHETHER THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT IS MORE FLEXIBLE. AS SUGGESTED ELSEWHERE, WE HAVE HAD OTHER INDICATIONS THAT A CHANGE IN US MIDDLE EAST POLICY IS NO LONGER A PRECONDITION FOR RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS. IT WOULD ALSO BE NORMAL FOR THE INFORMATION MINISTER TO TAKE A MORE RIGID STANCE IN PUBLIC THAN MIGHT BE THE CASE IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. WHAT DOES RING VERY TRUE IN THE MINISTER'S REMARKS IS THE INDICATION THAT THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS THAT WE ARE MORE EAGER THAN THEY ARE TO RESUME DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. TO THE EXTENT THAT THE IRAQI LEADERSHIP BELIEVES THAT THIS IS THE CASE, IT MAY CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT IT CAN OBTAIN SOME KIND OF CONCESSION FROM THE U.S. IN RETURN FOR RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR US TO AVOID CONVEYING SUCH AN IMPRESSION WHILE, AT

THE SAME TIME, LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN TO AN IRAQI
MOVE.
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